

COMPREHENSIVE REENTRY SYSTEM

CONCEPT PAPER

Developed by the

**REENTRY
SUB-COMMITTEE**

of the

**HAMILTON COUNTY CRIMINAL
JUSTICE COMMISSION**

March, 2009

Preface

The Reentry Sub-Committee of the Hamilton County Criminal Justice Commission began its work on April 3, 2007. It met monthly to determine existing services, needs of offenders, barriers to re-entry, and to develop a plan which would provide a more positive comprehensive approach to those re-entering society from incarceration.

The membership on this sub-committee represented a number of agencies that support re-entry efforts. Members were added to assist in the sub-committee's work. It was always believed that there were still more individuals and groups who were working on such efforts. The representatives and the agencies they represent are given below.

Individual	Organization or Agency Represented
Mike Allen	Defense Attorney
Lynne Ausman	Homeless Coalition
Tom Berghausen	Talbert House
Daniel Brooks, Chair	Mayor, North College Hill
Richard Brooks	Adult Parole Authority
John P. Bruggen	Hamilton County
Stephanie Dunlap	Literacy Center West
Larry Frazier	Commissioner Portune's Office
Lorri Frazier	Community Action Agency
Jan Gehring	Commissioner Pepper's Office
Scott Gehring	Volunteers of America
Georgine Getty	Homeless Coalition
Steven Hawley	P.A.C.E. Empowerment Corporation
Gregory Hutchins	Natl. Org. of Black Law Enforcement Execs.
Stephen Johnson Grove	Ohio Justice and Policy Center
Paula Knecht	Hamilton County
Diana McIntosh	Ham. Co. Mental Health & Recov. Serv. Board
Mary Carol Melton	Cincinnati Union Bethel
Wendy Niehaus	Hamilton County Pretrial Services
Karen Price	Hamilton County Sheriff's Office
Tom Sauer	Hamilton County Pretrial Services
Joe Schmitz	Hamilton County Sheriff's Office
Walter Smitson	Hamilton County Court Clinic
Kim Snow	Hamilton County Sheriff's Office
Jeff Startzman	Hamilton County Job & Family Services
Barb Tombs	Vera Institute
Stephen Tucker	Urban League of Cincinnati

The Honorable Dan Brooks, Mayor of North College Hill was the chairperson of the group. His vision of the sub-committee's work was to think of what was needed and to envision what best

could accomplish those needs. Since the current efforts collectively serve a fraction of those who need services, there needed to be a change in focus. Re-entry would be defined as follows:

“Re-entry is a process beginning at the time of the offense (arrest), giving the individual the opportunity to come back into society through the removal of barriers and the generation of hope, trust and individual empowerment to do something differently.”

This definition guided the sub-committee's work and led to this concept paper that serves as a focal point for future discussion and implementation.

Table of Contents

I.	Overview	5
II.	Reentry Movement – National and Local Context	6
	A. National Reentry Context	6
	B. Hamilton County’s Reentry Context	7
	C. National Reentry Models	7
III.	Reentry Sub-Committee Recommendations	8
	A. Sub-Committee Approach	8
	B. The Self-Sustaining Re-entry Community	10
	C. Short Term Recommendations (0-12 Months)	11
	1. Creation of a Re-entry Office	11
	2. Ongoing Development of an Offender Needs Assessment Process/Tool	12
	3. The Creation of an Effective Mentorship Program	12
	4. Creation of an Inventory of Services	13
	5. Accountability	14
	D. Intermediate Term Recommendations (12-36 Months)	14
	1. Reentry Transition Center	15
	2. Accountability	15
	E. Long Term Recommendations (36-60 Months)	15
	1. Reentry Transition Center	15
	2. Accountability	15
IV.	State Policy Changes Supported by the Reentry Sub-Committee	15
	A. Modify BCI background checks	15
	B. Expand Expungement Alternatives	16
	C. Child Support	16
V.	Local Policy Changes Supported by the Reentry Sub-Committee	16
	A. Increase Employment-focused Intervention Strategies for child support Cases	16
	B. Create a Robust Transitional Employment Program	16
	C. Modify Hamilton County Hiring Policy	17
VI.	Perspective	17

Appendices

A.	Reentry Systems Implemented in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Cleveland	18
-----------	---	-----------

HAMILTON COUNTY REENTRY SUBCOMMITTEE COMPREHENSIVE REENTRY SYSTEM CONCEPT PAPER

I. Overview

In 2006, a study of the Hamilton County Justice system showed that there were 45,000 offenders who were processed for adjudication and incarceration. The average offender in Hamilton County re-offends a total of nine times.¹

After careful review of Hamilton County's re-offender population, the services available, the county's reentry infrastructure and national reentry practices, the Reentry Sub-Committee proposes that the county develop a comprehensive reentry system, providing coordination for services already present in the community and filling in transitional gaps where they exist. The recommendations set forth a three stage process, with the final stage resulting in the establishment of a self sustaining re-entry community equipped to directly service the multiple service needs of newly released offenders.

This proposal begins by providing an overview of the national and local reentry issues that have informed the Sub-Committee's process. It then describes the general framework of a comprehensive reentry system, and includes a series of recommendations targeted at building the system's infrastructure. The process used by the Sub-Committee is also outlined.

Understanding the Sub-Committee's definition of "re-entry" is essential to appreciating the Sub-Committee's work, insight and recommendations: **"Re-entry is a process beginning at the time of the offense (arrest), giving the individual the opportunity to come back into society through the removal of barriers and the generation of hope, trust and individual empowerment to do something differently."** This definition has served as the anchor and guidepost for the Sub-Committee's work.

The purpose of this paper is three-fold: first, to share with the Commissioners and the Criminal Justice Commission as a whole, our concepts and visions for the development of a successful re-entry policy; second, to inform the same of the status of that journey; and, finally, to make preliminary recommendations that we feel will lead to achieving the stated goals. By creating a centralized, coordinated reentry system that facilitates the transition between jail and the community, Hamilton County can reduce recidivism, increase public safety and impact rising correctional costs.

¹ Include study reference here.

II. Reentry Movement – National and Local Context

Dramatic increases in the incarceration rate and corrections costs over the last decade have brought national attention to the administration of criminal justice systems across the country. The incarceration surge, largely a result of “tough on crime” legislation passed in the 1970’s and 1980’s, overwhelmed prison capacity at the state level and increasingly strained already tight state budgets. The overcrowding of state prisons resulted in a statewide correctional bottleneck, forcing state prison bound offenders to remain in local jails for extended periods of time. The combination of increased reliance on incarceration and a correctional bottleneck has strained correctional systems at both the state and county levels.

The exponential growth of jail and prison populations over the last decade, met with limited prisoner release planning has had tremendous implications for corrections spending and community safety. As the criminal justice system has contended with an unprecedented numbers of newly released inmates, the national consciousness has shifted toward cost-saving, crime prevention policies. One of the main outgrowths of this focus on crime prevention has been the reentry movement.

A. National Reentry Context

Over the last decade, one of the most significant challenges facing criminal justice policy makers has been in addressing recidivism. Research has demonstrated that a large segment of the incarcerated population is composed of repeat offenders that constantly cycle in and out of the system. The recognition that solving the recidivism crisis could dramatically reduce criminal justice costs, increase community safety, and create a new class of productive members of society has generated a national movement around reentry. While the benefits of reducing recidivism rates are apparent, developing strategies to address the re-offender population has proven more difficult.

The complex web of issues facing offenders upon release from incarceration makes reintegration into the community difficult. According to an Urban Institute report analyzing jail populations, gaining employment is among the most important, yet difficult challenges for offenders upon release.² Released offenders’ lack of education or vocational training, limited job experiences and connections, and a criminal history often places them at a disadvantage in the job market that makes securing employment difficult. An issue that offenders often confront immediately upon release is lack of housing. An arrest or short term of incarceration creates a substantial risk of homelessness and shelter use, increasing the likelihood of recidivism. Additionally, criminal convictions can result in ineligibility for subsidized housing and can subject an offender to zoning restrictions, making reentry even more difficult. Finally, many offenders released from jail suffer from mental health diagnoses (I would say symptoms or issues), substance abuse histories, and/or physical ailments, all of which require some level of treatment and monitoring. The volume and depth of the issues confronting offenders as they are released from correctional facilities make reentry a complicated process requiring coordinated efforts. A summary of the

² Solomon, Amy L., Jenny W. Osborne, Stefan F. LoBuglio, Jeff Mellow, and Debbie A. Mukamal. Life After Lockup: Improving Reentry from Jail to the Community. Bureau of Justice Assistance, Urban Institute, and John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2008. 1-179.

Sub-Committee's findings on issues confronting ex-offenders when attempting to re-enter Hamilton County can be found in Appendix A.

B. Hamilton County's Reentry Context

Over the last decade, Hamilton County has been confronted with the same criminal justice challenges facing the rest of the nation. By 2006, Hamilton County's annual corrections budget had reached \$44.4 million, and increases in the number of jail inmates forced the county to outsource for additional bed space.³ In 2007-2008, budget cuts have resulted in greater numbers of inmates being released into the community. Additional cuts in the proposed 2009 budget have already resulted in an increased numbers of inmates being released, thus resulting in a critical need for effective re-entry services. In addition to mounting correctional costs and jail overcrowding issues, a study of Hamilton County's jail population estimated that the average Hamilton County inmate had been incarcerated seven previous times, and approximated an adult recidivism rate of over 70%.⁴ In 2007, in response to these criminal justice concerns, the Hamilton County Criminal Justice Commission created the Standing Reentry Sub-Committee. The Standing Reentry Sub-Committee was delegated authority, "to analyze the reentry issues and processes faced by offenders as they end their term of incarceration and reenter the community, with the goal being to reduce recidivism and improve the well-being of ex-offenders and the public." Recent budget cuts resulting in the discontinuation of the Butler County jail contract place even more pressure on the Reentry Sub-Committee to develop a meaningful solution to the county's recidivism problem.

Through its monthly meetings, the Standing Reentry Sub-Committee has made significant strides over the course of the last year. Among its accomplishments is the creation of the Offender Reentry Resource Card, a wallet-size document issued to inmates upon release, providing key information about local government agencies and service providers that assist with the reentry process. These cards are now being distributed to ex-offenders at the jail, as well as through probation and parole offices. In addition to producing the resource cards, the Reentry Sub-Committee convened focus groups with ex-offenders and local employers, gathering information about the impact of criminal convictions on employability. The Sub-Committee's final accomplishment of this year was the Reentry Sub-Committee Retreat, day long session to discuss the effective and reasonable short, medium and long term solutions to the challenges of re-entry, which serves as the basis for this concept paper.

C. National Reentry Models

In considering the type of reentry program that would meet the needs of Hamilton County, the Standing Reentry Sub-Committee conducted a scan of reentry practices across the country. In evaluating the various approaches that local jurisdictions have taken to address reentry, the Sub-Committee identified two trends. First, many local jurisdictions have created central administrative bodies that coordinate the provision of reentry services. Second, many jurisdictions have created "One Stop Shop" centers, where offenders can directly access multiple services at a single location. A summary of the reentry systems implemented in Philadelphia,

³ Hamilton County Budget 2008, approved by the Board of County Commissioners December 19, 2007.

⁴ Hamilton County Comprehensive Safety Plan, May 2007

Baltimore and Cleveland are included in Appendix B. Examples of reentry systems implemented in San Francisco and other jurisdictions will continue to be examined and evaluated by the Sub-Committee in the coming months to ascertain applicability to Hamilton County.

III. Standing Reentry Sub-Committee Recommendations

"Man, I got released at 6:00 a.m. in the morning last Tuesday in my shorts, the clothes I wore in here last fall. I was given a bus token and allowed to phone somebody. The person I called had no minutes on their cell phone. I ain't got no minutes either. Not sure where I'ma goin' to go. Don't know where to begin or what to do. I don't want to go back to what I did before but that's all I know."⁵

A. The Sub-Committee's Approach

The above comment was made by an ex-offender relative to his situation upon his release. Whether it be right or wrong, the fact that this perception exists formed the sub-committee's basis for its work. It quickly became obvious to all that a change of attitude must be made by both providers and "clients" of the criminal justice system.

Using the above definition of "reentry" as the guidepost, the sub-committee's approach to reach meaningful, lasting change and improvement within the system contained three basic components which is detailed as Exhibit 1 on the next page.

First, the sub-committee analyzed existing "perceived" obstacles to re-entry to determine whether they were really obstacles or merely perceived as such. This was achieved through an extensive interview process with both employers as well as ex-offenders themselves. Secondly, once enumerated and verified, the elements were categorized into sub-categories that related to the main themes, namely Employment, Education, and Centralized Co-ordination. Figure One on the next page shows how these concepts related to each other.

Having completed the first two components listed above, the committee is proceeding with implementation. The various issues that have evolved through the process have pointed the sub-committee in a direction that demanded the creation of a valid, workable and affordable concept that meets the defined challenges. The collectively developed concept deals with prevailing attitudes, policies, practices, legislation and both physical and fiscal structure. The purpose of this report is to present our concept and must not be assumed to be the end of the process. The sub-committee feels that the proposals presented here are "do-able" and much work remains to be done.

In the upcoming months, the sub-committee will address each category and develop a means for implementation of each. Procedures and systems will result in charts that allow for tracking accountability of those providing and using the system, the net cost of such implementation programs, and the funding methods that can be utilized to achieve the concept of re-entry as conceptualized by the sub-committee.

These may be lofty goals but failure to achieve them is not an option. There are legions of talented, qualified and dedicated people working within the criminal justice system. The

Exhibit One

members of the Re-entry Sub-committee are but a few. At the conclusion of this journey, the trip will have been well worth it.

B. The Self-Sustaining Re-entry Community

The Standing Reentry Sub-Committee has developed a series of recommendations aimed at building the infrastructure needed to create a comprehensive reentry system. The ultimate goal of the Sub-Committee is to establish a self-sustaining re-entry community, in which offenders can receive multiple on-site reentry services including housing, employment, drug treatment, counseling, etc. Given the infrastructure necessary to develop this full service community, the Sub-Committee recommends taking an incremental reform approach. Accordingly, the Sub-Committee established a timeline, delineating the expected outcomes over a five year period. The timeline begins with the Sub-Committee's short term goals that address the immediate gaps (0-12 months), followed by immediate goals (12-36 months), and ends with the long term goal of creating a self sustaining reentry community (36-60 months).

Although each recommendation may be viewed as a stand-alone recommendation, collectively they each play a role in developing the capacity of the Reentry Office to expand into a Transition Center. The Sub-Committee's first recommendation is the creation of a Reentry Office, an administrative office which serves primarily to coordinate service referrals to newly released offenders. As the implementation process unfolds, the Reentry Office expands, eventually leading to the Reentry Office's ability to provide on-site services. In its final form, the Reentry Office is transitioned to the Reentry Community described above, which directly serves each of the primary need areas of newly released offenders. Many fine programs and services currently exist and are already incorporating some of the activities discussed here (Please see Appendix A). It is the intent of the Sub-Committee in this initial phase to examine these services to determine the best way to build upon them and assess their success or failure. After carefully examining the multitude of challenges facing newly released offenders and surveying the current reentry services available in Hamilton County, the Standing Reentry Sub-Committee makes a series of recommendations:

Short Term Recommendations: (0-12 Months)

- (1) Establish a Reentry Services Office: The center will begin as a centrally located office, where "clients" will receive comprehensive, easy to understand information on needs assessment, mentorship, and a list of applicable services;
- (2) Continue to develop an offender needs assessment process/tool;
- (3) Develop an effective mentorship program;
- (4) Create an inventory of community-based services; and
- (5) Monitor progress and present monthly reports to stakeholders.

Intermediate Recommendations: (12-36 Months)

- (1) Develop a Reentry Transition Center; and
- (2) Monitor progress and present monthly reports to stakeholders.

Long Term Recommendations: (36-60 Months)

- (1) Create a Comprehensive Reentry Community; and
- (2) Monitor progress and present monthly reports to stakeholders.

C. Short Term Recommendations (0-12 Months)

The short term goals take place over the next twelve months, and address the immediate gaps in Hamilton County's social service landscape. While the county has numerous service providers, the lack of coordination among providers and the segregation of services often require offenders to travel to multiple sites to access services. Additionally, the absence of centralized information about service providers leads to confusion about the existence and availability of services. At present, the response of the incarcerated individual (e.g. client), given such confusion, is to give up. These are immediate problems that should be addressed within the next twelve months through the following recommendations.

1. Creation of a Reentry Office

Many offenders re-enter the Hamilton County criminal justice system with a complex web of problems. The issues range from indigence, unemployment and a lack in social supports to substance abuse and mental health disorders, chronic medical conditions and homelessness. Even if the offender enters the system with a degree of stability, an episode of arrest or incarceration can trigger the disruption of those community ties, often resulting in job loss, eviction, and termination of government entitlements. At present, the county has a system-wide infrastructure system upon which one can build so that newly released offenders can be adequately transitioned back into the community. Hamilton County could benefit from a single entity which is equipped with the expertise to address the array of immediate challenges facing offenders upon release.

As an immediate solution to the lack of transitional services, the Sub-Committee recommends the development of a Reentry Office. This centralized office would serve primarily as a referral center for the various services available in the community (i.e. transportation, mentorship, job training, job placement, housing referrals, legal aid, child care, etc.). The office would act as an information center for newly released offenders, service providers, and other criminal justice systems, providing a short term solution to the lack of coordination and knowledge sharing that currently inhibits successful reentry. While the short-term Reentry Office will not be equipped to provide direct on-site services, following the initial twelve month period the Reentry Office will expand to a Transition Center, which *will* have limited capacity to provide onsite services.

To effectively establish a Re-entry Office, a Social Service Summit should be held which gives Hamilton County service providers an opportunity to introduce and share information about their services to offenders, the community, and with each other in an effort to create a more cohesive and informative system. One of the problems identified by the Sub-Committee in the current scheme of service provision is the large number of disconnected service providers. The large number of service providers combined with high turnover rates makes it difficult to develop a working knowledge of services available in the community. Additionally, the splintering of services among multiple agencies creates a necessity for collaboration building among service providers, since offenders often require a multitude of services as they reenter the community.

In addition to creating an avenue for networking among service providers, the Social Service Summit serves as a means to collect information for the inventory of services. The Social Service Summit would provide an opportunity to educate the providers about Hamilton County's

reentry plan, and familiarize those providers with the Reentry Office and its function. Since the Reentry Office would serve as one of the largest social service referral agencies in the county, social service providers have an interest in ensuring their inclusion in the referral process and providing the county with an accurate snapshot of their program's capacity.

2. Ongoing Development of an Offender Needs Assessment Tool

The Reentry Sub-Committee recommends the continued development and validation of needs assessment tools that accurately and comprehensively reflects an offender's needs, and tracks the offender from intake to community reentry. Understanding the needs of the offender is critical to the success of the reentry process. Additionally, the Hamilton County Justice Center should continue providing reentry programming to inmates to prepare them for release.

Recent changes in the profiles and outcomes of the over 45,000 individuals processed annually through the Hamilton County jail has given rise for Hamilton County to assess its criminal justice policies and practices. Understanding that there is great variance within this population, the demonstrated cyclical arrest and longer periods of incarceration, especially for marginal populations prompted a call to examine collaborative reentry practices at the county level. Detainee and offender profiles verified significant mental health, substance abuse, chronic health conditions, unemployment, social isolation and homelessness⁵

Hamilton County currently uses an inventory of needs screening instrument developed by the University of Cincinnati. This instrument was created as a means to gauge what is needed to build a stable foundation in preparation for one's return from jail back to the community. By incorporating strength based assessment principles, self-assessment and a clinical assessment, the tool attempts to accurately match offenders with services. The instrument has been in use for the past year and a half, but has not yet been validated. The Sub-Committee recommends the continued enhancement of the inventory of needs instrument, and the validation of the instrument.

The continued improvement of jail reentry programming and assessment tools that capture offender's service needs will help the proposed Reentry Office identify critical reentry services. Since the overall goal is the development of a comprehensive Reentry Community with on-site service delivery, it is important to have accurate and specific knowledge about which services are most critical to offender success. It is also imperative to build working relationships between jail staff and service providers in the community.

3. Develop an Effective Mentorship Program

Offenders' isolation during the criminal justice process and the complexity of the social services industry makes the development of a strong mentorship system invaluable. For offenders confronting a wide array of issues upon release, including serious challenges to accessing necessary services, having a community resource personally invested in that offender's success can provide a necessary support system. A recent study documenting the experiences of 30,000 offenders recently released from prison, found a death rate over 13 times higher than the general

⁵ Hamilton County Pretrial Services Jail Monitoring Systems 2003-2006.

population during the first two weeks of release.⁶ Recidivism rates for prisoners are also highest in their first weeks and months after release.⁷ It is important that offenders have a support system available during the vulnerable period following their release from incarceration. One aspect of this support system can be established through mentorship.

Currently, a few organizations are utilizing this practice. The Reentry Sub-Committee recommends the continued development of a mentorship system that begins at intake, and utilizes the resources of the faith-based community, ex-offenders and community volunteers. Mentors have the potential to serve as personal liaisons or life coaches to offenders attempting to navigate incarceration and the social services community, and can also act to identify and fill gaps in the criminal justice and social service systems. This unique opportunity to foster personal relationships between incarcerated offenders and productive community members that carryover into the offender's release back into the community promises increased chances of success.

It is important that the mentorship program include ex-offenders that have been able to change their lives and achieve relative success. Hamilton County jail has had positive experiences utilizing ex-offenders to facilitate programs and provide motivational speaking to incarcerated offenders. Ex-offenders that have made the difficult shift from a criminal lifestyle to productive citizenship have an easier time establishing credibility with inmates. By modeling personal growth and achievement, ex-offenders can serve as powerful examples for incarcerated people facing reentry challenges.

A program of trained mentors is an immediate measure leading to a long term solution to the current lack of transitional reentry services. Establishing continuity and support systems is an important aspect of the reentry process, and a well developed mentorship program is one avenue towards that objective. Given the prospect of federal funding through faith initiatives, the current underutilization of mentorship, and the demonstrated success of mentorship in enhancing reentry, it is imperative that the county begin developing this service. Mentorship will be one of many programs that will aid the Reentry Community in offering offenders a comprehensive menu of services.

4. Create an Inventory of Community-Based Services

For successful reintegration into the community to be actualized, it is important to begin the reentry process at the point of arrest, identifying resources to assist an offender while in jail as well as upon release. Hamilton County's volume of providers and fragmentation of services has produced a vacuum of knowledge about service provision. Expanding on the Offender Reentry Resource Card, the Reentry Commission recommends conducting an inventory of services which

⁶ "Release from Prison—A High Risk of Death for Former Inmates," The New England Journal of Medicine 356, no. 2 (2007): 157–65. (The study analyzed death rates of 30,000 prisoners released from Washington state and found that these individuals died at rates 13 times higher than the general population in the first 2 weeks after release, primarily due to drug overdoses, heart disease, homicides, and suicides).

⁷ Langan, Patrick, and David Levin, Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report NCJ 193427 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002); Rosenfeld, Richard, Joel Wallman, and Robert J. Fornango, "The Contribution of Ex-Prisoners to Crime Rates," in Prisoner Reentry and Public Safety in America, ed. Jeremy Travis and Christy Visser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

profiles each service provider, and gathers information about the use of evidence based practices, target population, admission criteria, process evaluations and funding streams.

To assist in meeting the identified need(s), the county could develop an easily obtainable resource guide and process to inform released offenders of available services.^{xx} Listed below are recommendations to consider in developing an inventory of resources that could serve as a guide:

- Tap into existing web based resource and information programs, such as 211, and work with the web based programs to tailor components to ex-offenders.
- Publish a paper inventory of local resources with descriptions of programs, eligibility, access, and contact information.

The major challenge in implementing the above recommendations is keeping the guides current and accurate. Another challenge is the cost of implementing the web-based resource, both with its development and the resources needed to keep the technology and the information up to date. The major benefit is the ex-offender would learn there are resources available to facilitate reintegration into the community. This would offer hope as well as practical information to ensure a good quality of life and success in the community.

The current lack of a comprehensive inventory of services leads to confusion about the existence and availability of services. Offenders that are given non-productive service referrals are likely to disengage in the process and engage in at risk behavior. The development of an updated inventory of services serves as the knowledge base of the Reentry Office, the centralized administrative entity which will be responsible for making referrals to offenders post jail release. In order to function effectively, the Reentry Office will need to be aware of the location and availability of services in the community. The creation of a database which synthesizes this information and makes it available for the Reentry Office as well as the community at large will enhance service provision and reentry in the county, leading to a lower rate of recidivism.

5. Accountability

The most important component of this effort is sustained accountability. In other words, is what is proposed and being created actually serve the purposes for which it was created. Regular monthly reports will detail an evaluation protocol and report it. Critical to this evaluation are a common set of definitions regarding re-entry and re-offender. This reporting will be made to the stakeholders and to the public.

D. Intermediate Term Recommendations (12-36 Months)

The intermediate term recommendation takes place over a twelve to thirty-six month period, and involves the absorption of the Reentry Office into a Reentry Transition Center. Acknowledging budget and timing realities, the Reentry Transition Center is not designed to be an all-service entity, but rather will house the most critical and practical reentry services. This Reentry Transition Center is the middle stage of a three staged process, which ends with an all-service comprehensive reentry community.

1. Reentry Transition Center

The Reentry Transition Center will provide a range of critical offender reentry services on site. The transition center will continue to provide referrals for services not present on-site, and will expand its capacity to provide on-site services during the thirty six month period. The knowledge and experience developed through the inventory of needs and Reentry Office will serve as the basis for the selection of critical services to be provided on-site. One of the crucial aspects of the transition center will be the continued and expanded use of mentors in providing support and assistance to offenders

2. Accountability.

The most important component of this effort, once again, is sustained accountability. In other words, is what is proposed and being created actually serves the purposes and goals understood by the stakeholders. Regular monthly reports will utilize the evaluation protocol developed in the first year. This reporting will be made to the stakeholders and to the public.

E. Long Term Recommendations (36-60 Months)

1. Comprehensive Reentry Community – One Stop Shop

The Sub-Committee recommends the development of a one-stop shop that provides newly released offenders with comprehensive and centralized services. This final reentry entity is designed to be a self-sustaining re-entry community, in which offenders can receive a multitude of services including; general life skills, educational assistance, mental health and substance abuse services, employment and housing. The self-sustaining component of the community will be achieved through a well developed educational and employment curriculum and program that capitalizes on labor investment from the offender participants. We have used information from the Delancey Street Foundation (e.g. <http://www.delanceystreetfoundation.org/>) as background.

2. Accountability.

All citizens must know the progress being made and if recidivism is being reduced. A robust research model with sustained accountability will allow for adjustments to be made. Regular monthly reports will utilize the evaluation protocol developed in the first year. This reporting will be made to the stakeholders and to the public.

IV. State Policy Changes Supported by the Standing Reentry Sub-Committee

Numerous current laws and regulations have a significant impact on the ability of people with criminal records to reintegrate into our community. We encourage county officials to review the impact of these current statutes and policies and advocate for the necessary changes through County Commissioners Association of Ohio.

A. Modify BCI Background Checks

The Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation is the official state reporter of criminal background checks. Numerous state and local agencies—and private employers—look to BCI

when making employment and licensure decisions. Under current Ohio law, BCI reports *only* the original charge for any case resulting in a conviction. This is incredibly destructive for many Ohioans—and without any benefit to society. For example, a client was charged with felony aggravated assault; it was his first and only offense. At trial it became clear that the charges were greatly exaggerated and he pled guilty to a minor misdemeanor, disorderly conduct (a ticket; jail time is not even possible for such an offense). Yet, this client has been rejected from several jobs because the BCI check lists “felony aggravated assault.” It is essential that Ohio law be changed so that employers and licensing agencies are making decisions based on the crime of conviction, not original charges.

B. Expand Expungement Alternatives

Under Ohio law, only first-time, non-violent offenders can get their records expunged. This law can be made less restrictive, while still allowing for employers and others to make responsible decisions based on criminal background checks. Social science research has shown that after seven years of crime-free living, the average ex-offender has *the same likelihood* of committing a new crime as someone with no criminal record at all.⁸ In other words, as criminal records become older and a person has a longer time in the community with no crimes, their old criminal records become irrelevant. Expungement law should be changed so that the eligibility rules are governed by how old an offense is and how long the offender has lived without committing a new crime, *not* by the number of offenses.

C. Child Support

The State Office of Child Support and the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections have been working on major legal reforms to enhance the payment of support and to break down the barriers for ex-offenders returning to the community. These recommendations have been released. This Sub-Committee recommends the adoption of the proposed legal reforms.

V. Local Policy Changes Supported by the Reentry Sub-Committee

A. Increase Employment-focused Intervention Strategies for Child-support Cases

Currently, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections through a grant to the Common Pleas Court, is providing a form of diversion/intervention with employment assistance and training to obligors charged with criminal non-support of dependents. The CSEA is working with the Court to expand this intervention to obligors before they are convicted and therefore end up with a felony record - which severely hampers future employment options.

B. Create a Robust Transitional Employment Program

The Sub-Committee recommends the development of an employment program, which focuses on people recently assigned to parole or probation. The employment program should follow a model similar to the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) program in New York City, which includes basic job-skill and life-skill coaching, and supportive services.⁹ The CEO is tightly integrated into the local government; for example, ex-offenders in transitional employment provide basic labor for work projects in other government agencies. Most

importantly, this program has shown a 50% reduction in recidivism. This program can and should be meshed with existing efforts to improve employment opportunities for people with criminal records, such as the Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) and the Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network.

C. Modify Hamilton County Hiring Policy

The Sub-Committee recommends that Hamilton County Personnel Department Administrative Regulations modify its employment policies to ensure people with old or irrelevant criminal records are not excluded from employment opportunities. The county should lead efforts to employ ex-offenders by eliminating county employment policies which discriminate against people with criminal records. Currently, the county applies a blanket ban on employment applicants with felony records, without consideration of the date or nature of the conviction.⁸ The Sub-Committee recommends the following policy changes:

1. The county should replace the current policy of categorically excluding applicants with criminal records, with a policy which emphasizes hiring the most qualified, trustworthy, and non-dangerous applicants.
2. All applicants should be evaluated on qualifications and references before the criminal background check. The criminal background check should be conducted only if the county makes a positive hiring decision; and
3. If there is a prior criminal record, the personnel department should consider the age of the offense, the age of the applicant when the offense was committed, the amount of crime-free time for the applicant since the last offense, the current age of the offender and his/her likelihood to re-offend, the nature of the offense and whether it is relevant to the job being applied for, and any other evidence of rehabilitation that the applicant can provide.

VI. Perspective

Finally, in order for these recommendations to work, there must be a significant change in perspective regarding the offenders. These recommendations suggest an approach that realizes that everyone has access to the American dream, no matter what their background or need. It is everyone's responsibility to work with each other to ensure that everyone can be successful. Reentry is difficult for every person who must go through it and they need to learn what needs to be done, what the tools are to get it done, and then be mentored through the process. Reducing recidivism ought to be everyone's responsibility and these recommendations suggest that it is possible.

⁸ See, Admin. Reg. 11-04.

APPENDIX A

- REENTRY SYSTEM MODELS-

National Reentry Models

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (<http://www.phila.gov/reentry/>)

In its first year in 2007, the Philadelphia Reentry Office serviced approximately 1,902 ex-offenders from federal, state and county prisons, and provided the following array of services: job training, placement and retention services; vocational training; job readiness training; life skills development; housing assistance; mental health and substance abuse treatment services; parenting; case management services; utilities assistance; and, mentoring services. The Reentry Office's success led to the creation of multiple Reentry One Stop Centers, whose goals were to reduce recidivism and to increase public safety by offering a comprehensive menu of support under one roof. While many of the services are accessible on site, other resources are made available through referrals to outside partners that include: Adult Probation and Parole; Department of Behavioral Health; Office of Supportive Housing; Philadelphia Defender's Association; Faith Based Partners; Philadelphia Prison System and the District Attorney's Office.

In order to develop employment opportunities for ex offenders, the city has established a \$10,000 per year municipal tax credit to companies that hire former prisoners and provide them tuition support or vocational training.

Baltimore, Maryland (<http://www.oedworks.com/exoffender.htm>)

In response to the recommendation of the Baltimore Citywide Ex-offenders Task Force,⁹ the city created the Baltimore Reentry Center, also known as the ReC. The ReC's mission is to coordinate previously fragmented services, resources and activities directed toward ex offenders and act as a designated change agent to assist ex offenders in making an employment connection. Specifically, the ReC provides ex-offenders with access to high-tech digital computer labs, employment training, job search services, child support modification, identification obtainment, and housing referrals. Additionally, the Center serves as a referral partner to the Department of Probation and Parole, accepting newly-released ex-offenders who have at least one year remaining under supervision, and who are classified as being in need of intensive supervision by virtue of scoring in the "high" or "moderate" need categories on the 54-item Level of Service Inventory Revised risk assessment tool. Since opening in July 2005, the center has offered its broad menu of transition, support, and employment-related services to approximately 2,500 ex-offenders.

Cleveland, Ohio (http://www.orianahouse.org/cleveland_transition_center.htm)

The Attorney General recently announced that the Northern District of Ohio had been elected as one of seven sites receiving a Prisoner Reentry Coordinator as part of a pilot program. The Reentry Coordinator is expected to bring together agencies from all levels of law enforcement, government, support services and community organizations to better serve the needs of prisoners reentering society. This position is responsible for coordinating efforts with the Cleveland Reentry Initiative, participating in statewide initiatives, and increasing the capacity of reentry efforts in the region.

⁹ The Baltimore Citywide Ex-offenders Task Force was established by the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED), and includes a membership of over 100 government agencies and community partners.

The Mayor's office of Cleveland also created the "Providing Real Opportunities for Ex-offenders to Succeed Program. Together, with the Alternative Agency, Inc., the program provides a four-week program includes life skills training, communication skills, and job readiness preparation. The focus of the program is to match ex-offenders with local employers; it also serves as a One Stop Shop where ex offenders can obtain wrap around services addressing all of their needs.

San Francisco, California (<http://www.delanceystreetfoundation.org/>)

It's considered the country's leading residential self-help organization for substance abusers, ex-convicts, homeless and others who have hit bottom. The average resident has been a hard-core drug addict for sixteen years, abusing alcohol and multiple drugs and has dropped out of school at the 7th grade and has been institutionalized several times. Many have been gang members; most have been trapped in poverty for several generations. Rather than hire experts to help the people with problems, it was decided to run Delancey Street with no staff and no funding. Like a large family, our residents must learn to develop their strengths and help each other. It's an approach to changing lives that is "against all odds".

Founders said they were going to take ex-convicts and ex-addicts and teach them to be teachers, general contractors, and truck drivers. They said it couldn't be done. They said they were going to take 250 people who had never worked and had no skills and teach them to build a 400,000 square foot complex as our new home on the waterfront. They said we were going to partner with colleges and get people who started out functionally illiterate to achieve bachelor of arts degrees. They said they were going to run successful restaurants, moving companies, furniture making, and cafés and bookstores without any professional help. They said they were going to do all this with no staff, no government funding, and no professionals.

For over 35 years the Delancey Street Foundation has been developing a model of social entrepreneurship, of education, of rehabilitation and change that is exciting and full of hope. They feel as inspired by ordinary people's abilities to achieve extraordinary accomplishments.